

Psychology (AQA)

AT A GLANCE

Psychology is defined as 'the scientific study of mind and behaviour'. The mind is something intangible that exists within the brain. An unseen process of enzymes, chemicals, and electric current moving within the structure of our neural networks dictates why we feel, think and behave the way we do.

If you are interested in studying the human mind and behaviour, then Psychology is the subject for you. As a Psychology student, you will examine how the discipline can help us to further our knowledge about human experience. On your course, you will address many important questions that psychological research has tried to answer. For example:

- How is human memory organised, and why does it sometimes let us down just when we need it most?
- Why do we sometimes conform to a numerical majority, or obey authority figures, when we know that what they are saying or telling us to do is wrong?
- How do new-born infants form attachments to their parents, and what are the consequences if these attachments are not formed?
- What are the causes of mental disorders and how can they best be treated?
- How do psychologists use different research methods to study questions like these?

EXAM BOARD: AQA NO COURSEWORK

The new AQA qualifications in AS and A Level Psychology have been developed in consultation with experts in higher education (HE) and the British Psychological Society. More than ever, the new AS and A Level specifications have the content, credibility, and rigour to support you in the next stage of your life, in academic study and in your career.

The new qualifications offer an engaging and effective introduction to Psychology, which is both relevant and stimulating, to inspire students of all abilities. On your course, you will study the fundamentals of the subject and develop skills including analysing arguments and evidence, testing hypotheses, making informed judgements, and critical thinking.

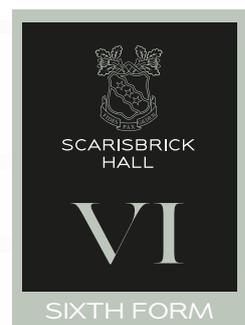
As part of the 'science suite' of subjects (which includes Physics, Chemistry, and Biology), Psychology needs practical investigation, so as part of your course you will also conduct practical and experimental work in the classroom as a way of helping to bring the subject to life. You will also learn how to design, conduct, and analyse your own research.

The new A Level Psychology Specification

Psychology is amongst the subjects whose specification has been reformed and the new syllabus will be taught for the first time from September 2015.

The approach at Scarisbrick Hall School is to continue to use the AS specification as the first year of the two-year course and for all students to sit the AS examination at the end of the lower sixth.

We believe this provides the best opportunity for practice and experience of real examination conditions at this level: it is the only fully authentic experience of the examination structure that is available before the full A-level examination.



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From September 2015, all subjects are moving from 'modular' to 'linear' assessment, with exams being taken at the end of a two-year A Level course. The AS Level course becomes a 'stand alone' qualification, which no longer contributes to your A Level grade, and you take your AS Level examinations at the end of one year.

At AS and A Level, you will be studying the following topics:

- **Social Influence:** This examines different types of conformity, explanations of why people conform, and some of the variables that affect how much people conform. It also looks at conformity to social roles, as famously studied by Zimbardo in his 'prison simulation experiment', and obedience to authority, as investigated by Stanley Milgram. We study explanations of obedience and individual and situational factors affecting how obedient we are. Our consideration of social influence continues with an examination of how we can resist pressures to conform and obey, and how numerical minorities can influence numerical majorities.
- **Memory:** Here, we look at different models of memory and their features and the different types of short- and long-term memory. We then look at different explanations for why forgetting occurs, and at some of the factors which can affect how accurate our memories are, especially when we have been eyewitnesses as some event or another. We also look at how the accuracy of eyewitness testimony can be improved, using techniques devised by psychologists, based on what we know about how memory operates.
- **Attachment:** This aspect of the course looks at how infant attachment has been studied, and cross-cultural variations in types of attachment. It then examines studies of attachment in non-humans, and how these have helped in the development of theories to explain human attachment. We also look at the consequences of disrupting the attachment between caregiver and infant, and how our early attachment type might influence our relationships in both childhood and adulthood.
- **Approaches in Psychology:** Here, we examine the emergence of Psychology as a scientific subject, and different theoretical approaches in Psychology. These include the 'learning' approach, the 'cognitive' approach, and the 'biological' approach.
- **Psychopathology:** We begin this part of the course by looking at how 'abnormality' can be defined, and the limitations that are associated with these definitions. Next, we look at the clinical characteristics of three different types of mental disorder (depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and phobias), and at their possible biological and psychological causes. We conclude this aspect of the course by looking at some of the therapeutic approaches that have been devised to treat these disorders.
- **Research Methods:** This part of the course looks at different research methods used by psychologists, including the experiment, observational techniques, self-report techniques, and correlational analysis.
- **Biopsychology:** This part of the course investigates the localisation and lateralisation of functions in the human brain, plasticity and functional recovery of the brain after trauma, and ways of studying the human brain (e.g. scanning techniques, EEGs, and ERPs).

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AS LEVEL EXAMINATIONS

Students following the AS Level course will sit two examinations. The first is called 'Introductory Topics in Psychology', and will examine Social Influence, Memory, and Attachment. Assessment is in the form of a written examination which lasts for 1 hour and 30 minutes and is worth 50% of the AS Level. The second examination is called 'Psychology in Context', and will examine Approaches in Psychology, Psychopathology, and Research Methods. Assessment is also in the form of a written examination which lasts for 1 hour and 30 minutes, and is worth the other 50% of the AS Level.

STUDY TOPICS

In addition to the topics already mentioned, students following the A Level course will also study the following topics:

- **Forensic Psychology:** This topic investigates problems in defining and measuring crime. It also looks at offender profiling and various explanations of offending behaviour including: biological, psychological and psychodynamic explanations. It covers the issues of dealing with offending behaviour and behaviour modification whilst in custody.
- **Schizophrenia:** here, we look at clinical characteristics of schizophrenia and issues surrounding the diagnosis and classification of schizophrenia. We continue by examining biological, psychological, and interactionist explanations of schizophrenia, and at approaches that are used in the treatment of schizophrenia.
- **Relationships:** This topic looks at evolutionary explanations for partner preferences and factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships as well as theories of romantic relationships. It also examines virtual relationships in social media and parasocial relationships.
- **Issues and Debates in Psychology:** Under consideration here are gender and cultural issues in Psychology, such as androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism. We also look at the free-will versus determinism debate, the nature versus nurture debate, and the holism versus reductionism debate. We conclude our studies of issues and debates by looking at idiographic and nomothetic approaches to psychological investigation, and the ethical implications of psychological research, especially in relation to socially sensitive topics.

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A LEVEL EXAMINATIONS

Students following the A Level course sit three examinations.

As with AS Level, the first is called 'Introductory Topics in Psychology', and also examines Social Influence, Memory, and Attachment. At A Level this paper will also include questions on Psychopathology.

Assessment is in the form of a written examination which lasts for 2 hours and is worth 33.3% of the A Level.

The second examination at A Level is also called 'Psychology in Context', but will examine Approaches in Psychology, Biopsychology and Research Methods.

Assessment is also in the form of a written examination which lasts for 2 hours and is also worth 33.3% of the A Level.

The third A Level examination is called 'Issues and Options in Psychology'. This paper examines 'Cognitive development', 'Schizophrenia', 'Aggression', and 'Issues and Debates in Psychology'.

As with the other examinations at A Level, it is a 2 hours written paper and is worth 33.3% of the A Level.

WHAT IF I HAVEN'T STUDIED PSYCHOLOGY BEFORE?

It doesn't matter. A GCSE in Psychology might give you a slight head start on some topics, but no more than that. All we ask is that you have a high level of commitment to our subject, and an analytical and questioning mind. We will do the rest.

SUITABLE COMBINATIONS

Arts and Science A Levels, as well as other Social Sciences, such as Government and Politics, Sociology and Law are all suitable combinations with Psychology.

AFTER A LEVEL

An A Level in Psychology be the springboard to further study of Psychology at degree level, as well as a wide range of other courses – Law, Management, Forensic Science, or any of the caring professions. Not only can Psychology be directly useful in your future study and work, but its greatest justification is the insight it will give you into everyday life.